



Create Your Own State Park Park Entrance

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Welcome to the Maryland Park Service's "Create Your Own State Park" Summer Challenge Program. Are you ready to get started? Come on in! Your park entrance will mark where you enter your park and shows everyone that they have arrived at a special place.

Did You Know?

- Maryland has **75** different State parks.
- Maryland has State Parks that include beaches, mountains, and waterfalls.
- Maryland's first State Park was **Patapsco Valley State Park**, which dates back to **1907**.
- Most Maryland residents live within **15 miles** of a State Park.

Activities

☐ Name Your Park

Pick a name for your park. It can be related to your park's location, who lives there, the types of plants and animals found there or its history. Be creative and make sure the whole family agrees on the name. Look online at the names of parks in Maryland (or other states) to get some ideas.

☐ Make an Entrance Sign

Make an entrance sign for your park using the name you picked. You can paint the name on a split log or on a big piece of bark. You could also use sticks, twigs and other natural materials to make the shape of letters and glue them on to something. Be creative and use your imagination! Show us your park entrance sign!

☐ Park Rules

Most parks have rules to keep park visitors safe and healthy. Make a list of rules for your park. State parks in Maryland are "Trash-Free Parks." That means that you have to take your trash with you when you leave, so that there aren't trash cans to ruin a good view, smell bad or attract flies and bees. You may want to look up "Leave No Trace" (LNT) principles and add some of those to your park rules.



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Create Your Own State Park Birding Area

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Birds are commonly found in our State Parks. Your park's Birding Area can provide habitat for many species of birds by incorporating food sources, water sources, nesting sites, and cover or protection for our feathered friends. Remember the more variety you are able to provide, the greater variety of birds you will have!

Did You Know?

- Over **450 species of birds** have been documented in Maryland, with more than two hundred different species of birds nesting and breeding in the state.
- Several Maryland State Parks are considered to be Maryland "**Birding Hot Spots**". These include Sandy Point State Park, Point Lookout State Park and Hart Miller Island State Park.

Activities

- ☐ **Plant Native Trees, Shrubs & Plants-** One of the best ways to provide year round food for birds is to plant native plants. Many types of birds will feed on the seeds, berries and nectar that these plants provide, or on the insects that are also attracted to those plants. You may also supplement wild food sources in your park with bird feeders.
- ☐ **Create a Bird Feeding Station-** There are many different types of bird feeders that you can add to your bird feeding station. You may wish to provide a seed tube feeder (for sunflower seeds), sock feeder (for nyjer thistle seed), a suet feeder (for suet blocks) or even a hummingbird feeder (for sugar water nectar). Different kinds of birds prefer different kinds of food. Feeders can be purchased commercially, or you can make one by recycling or reusing common items from around your home. Be creative!
- ☐ **Provide a Water Source for Birds-** Your birding area should have a source of water for birds to drink from and bathe in. This could be a birdbath, pond or water garden. Just like bird feeders, there are many different kinds of water features. Bird baths can sit on a pedestal, be hanging or attached to railing on a deck. You may also use a shallow dish on the ground filled with water and a few rocks. You can even make a bird bath from a stump or log in your yard. Bird baths do not need to be deep. Be sure to clean out your bird bath regularly. Empty the water every few days and refill with fresh water. Be creative- You may be able to make your birdbath by recycling or reusing something you already have at home!
- ☐ **Build a Birdhouse or Nest Box-** After learning which birds are commonly found in your park, or some you would like to attract to the area, build a nest box for them to use to lay eggs and raise their young. You may also find nest boxes available for purchase, if you are unable to build one yourself. It is best to select a nest box that is functional, not only decorative. Here are a few suggestions of birds that you might wish to provide a nest box for: American Robin, Eastern Bluebird, Mourning Dove and Purple Martin.
- ☐ **Start Your Birding "Life List"-** Take some time to observe and listen for the birds found in or near your park. Start a "Life List" of birds you have identified from your home. Use a field guide or identification app to help you learn the characteristics of different birds. What are some of the common birds at your park?



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Create Your Own State Park Woodland Area

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A forest of trees or even a single tree provides important wildlife habitat in Maryland's State Parks. Planting a native tree or shrub in your park will also help provide food and shelter for wildlife, for insects, birds, reptiles and even mammals. Trees also provide many other benefits - they provide shade on a hot summer day, help filter runoff from excess rainwater and produce oxygen in the air we breathe! Plus, trees can help beautify your neighborhood.

Did You Know?

- The Maryland State Tree is the **White Oak**.
- Maryland has a State Park named after an important tree- **Wye Oak State Park**. The Wye Oak was the largest white oak tree on record, both in Maryland and the nation. The Wye Oak fell in a storm in 2002, and was estimated to be nearly **500 years old**.
- Oak Trees support over **500 different types of caterpillars**- more than any other native tree or plant. These caterpillars are important food sources for birds.

Activities

- ❑ **Tree Inventory-** Take a close look around your park. Do you already have any trees or shrubs in your park? Try to find out what kind of tree(s) you have, using a field guide or identification app. Is it a native Maryland tree species?
- ❑ **Plant A Tree-** If you don't have any trees or shrubs in your park, could you plant one? Do some research on native tree species and select a tree you would like to plant. Plant a tree, if you can!
- ❑ **Tree Identification Signs-** Make signs or tags to help you to identify what type of trees you have in your park. Use clues from the leaves, bark and buds to help you to determine what kind of tree you have. You can use a field guide or identification app to help you. **Bonus Activity-** *Make a bark or leaf rubbing from one of your trees! See if you can find some twigs, acorns or other tree related items to frame your art!*
- ❑ **Create a Brush Pile-** Brush piles provide important cover and protection for wildlife. Brush piles are a deliberate collection of brush or branches, sticks and other plant material placed over a supporting base or foundation. You can create one in your park using logs and sticks. The finished pile should be shaped like a dome with a maze of cavities inside.
- ❑ **Create a Rock Pile-** Rock piles provide important habitat for smaller species, such as reptiles, amphibians and invertebrates in our parks. Many cold blooded animals will use rock piles because they hold heat. Use a variety of sizes of rocks to create a pile that has lots of crevices that animals can access.
- ❑ **Create an Amphibian House-** Use a clay flower pot to make a "Toad Abode" for your park. Crack off a small section of the top of the pot to make an entrance, then turn the pot over and place it in a shady spot in your yard or garden. This will provide a cool, dark place for amphibians to hide. You may wish to decorate your pot.



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Create Your Own State Park Wildflower Gardens

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Native plants naturally occur in the region in which they evolved. Because native plants are adapted to local soil and climate conditions, they require less watering and virtually no fertilizing. They attract and feed native insects which in turn feed native birds and small mammals. Native plants are the foundation for the food chain, regardless of geographic location.

Did You Know?

- Some types of wildlife depend on only one type of plant for survival? This is often called the **Host Plant**. **Milkweed** is such a plant for the native **Monarch** butterfly.
- Native plants, once established, require almost no watering or maintenance and can help crowd out unwanted weeds.
- Native grasses can have roots deeper than **10 feet** - compared to a typical turf grass of only 3 inches!
- The Maryland State Flower - the **Black-eyed Susan** - is a native species.

Activities

- ❑ **“Naturalize” a Patch of Lawn-** Sometimes, all you need to do is clear a space for native plants and they will thrive. If you have a patch of lawn where it is difficult to get grass to grow because it is too wet, too dry, or too shady - there are native plants that can thrive in such an environment. First, to get rid of the grass, you can simply lay out newspaper in several layers and wet it down. Cover the newspapers in leaves or mulch and keep moist for a couple of weeks. Before you know it - the grass will be gone and you’ll have a blank “canvas” to start your garden masterpiece.
- ❑ **Research Native Plants for Your Area-** Pick out a few Native Plants species- either shrubs or perennial plants- to learn more about. If you don’t already have a garden this is a good time to plan for one. If you do have a garden, could you add any native plants to it? If you’re short on space, you can even grow native plants in a container on a balcony or patio! Be sure to label the native plants in your park- you can paint a rock with plant names or use a wood stake. Be creative!
- ❑ **Plant a Butterfly Garden-** Native plants are key for a successful butterfly garden. Your butterfly garden should have a variety of flowers and nectar sources for butterflies, plus host plants for caterpillars to feed on. Do some research to find out what the host plants are for your favorite butterfly species. Many other pollinators, like bees, moths and hummingbirds, will also benefit from this garden!
- ❑ **Make Wildflower “Seed Balls”-** Assemble seed balls for naturalizing with native plants! With a simple mixture of air-dry clay, potting soil and your favorite wildflower seeds, you can make your own seed balls. You can plant these in a garden or an area of your yard that you’d like to go “wild”.
- ❑ **Remove Invasive Species-** Many of Maryland’s State Parks are removing non-native and invasive species to help benefit native flora and fauna. Invasive species are ones that cause damage to natural habitats. Often these species have no natural checks and can quickly “grow out of control”. Invasive species can be plant, animal, or even fungus. Learn more about invasive species and try to remove some from your park. **Bonus Activity-** *Do a bit of research on your own and make a poster to educate others about one (or more!) of invasive species to be on the lookout for in Maryland!*



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Create Your Own State Park Camping Area

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Many of Maryland's State Parks offer camping. Some people like to camp in a tent, while some prefer a cabin in the woods. State Parks offer a variety of different camping options. Most campsites have a large cleared area or camping pad, a picnic table, a lantern pole and fire ring.

Did You Know?

- Many of the camping cabins at **New Germany** and **Herrington Manor State Parks** were built by the **Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC)** in the 1930s.

Activities

- ☐ **Pitch A Tent and Go Camping-** Plan a camping trip in your own park- it might be in the yard, lawn or even on the back deck, you decide! Make a list of supplies that you will need for your camping trip. Then join the Maryland Park Service for "The Great American Backyard Campout" on June 27, 2020 (or anytime this summer!) You can camp out in your own backyard or if you're not up for an actual camping trip, make a blanket fort inside the comfort of your own home and pretend you are out camping.
- ☐ **Build a Campfire-** Most parks have a designated area for a campfire, typically a fire ring. Do you have somewhere outside of your house to create a fire ring and have a campfire? (If not, you can always have a pretend campfire inside!) ***Kids-** be sure to work with an adult to decide on the best place, keeping safety in mind at all times.* Build a fire ring and gather all of your campfire supplies. When making your campfire, start small- with the tinder and kindling, then build either a teepee or log cabin shape with your logs before you light the fire with a spark. *Remember- Never Leave a Campfire Unattended.*
- ☐ **Make S'mores-** Have you ever made s'mores? S'mores are a classic campfire recipe! If you don't have a campfire, you can still make s'mores right at home using the microwave- all you need are some graham crackers, marshmallows and chocolate! What are some other things that you can cook over a campfire?
- ☐ **Make Your Own Campfire Fun-** People gather round the campfire for fun! It's a great place to play a musical instrument, sing songs and tell stories! What is your favorite campfire song? You can also tell stories around the campfire...they can be funny, scary or silly! Share some of your favorite songs or stories with us.



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Create Your Own State Park Picnic Area

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Many state parks have a designated picnic area with picnic tables and grills and sometimes a shelter or pavilion. These are the perfect spots to gather with your family and friends, making memories in the great outdoors!

Did You Know?

- Over 14 million people visited **Maryland's State Parks** last year, and many came for picnicking.
- You can make a “trash free” picnic basket by using reusable plates, bowls and utensils for your picnic supplies!

Activities

- ☐ **Have a Picnic-** Do you have a place at your home for a picnic or outdoor meal? This could be a patio with a table and chairs or a nice grassy area where you can spread out a blanket. You can even have an indoor floor picnic, if the weather is bad! What are some of your favorite picnic foods? Show us a photo of your picnic.
- ☐ **Play Lawn Games-** Set up croquet, archery, badminton or other lawn games in your park. Try your hand at horseshoes, bean bag toss or ladder ball. Or maybe try out an old fashioned game of tag? Whatever recreational activity you choose, enjoy the open space and fresh air!
- ☐ **Put up a Hammock-** Take some time to relax in your picnic area in a hammock. Be sure to carefully hang it to not damage the trees, or use a hammock stand instead. Look up at the sky and enjoy the view from your hammock. Listen to the sounds all around you.
- ☐ **Minimize Lawn Area-** Although some lawn area is good for picnicking and games, it doesn't have to include your entire yard. Consider adding a “Grow, Don't Mow” zone in your park to minimize the amount of turf grass you have.



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Create Your Own State Park Trails

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State Parks are well known for their trail systems. Trails are used for many types of recreation, including hiking, biking and horseback riding. Park trails may be paved, gravel or natural surface.

Did You Know?

- Statewide, Maryland State Parks have over **1,000 miles** of trails that are used for **hiking, biking and horseback riding**.
- Approximately **40 miles** of the **Appalachian Trail** crosses Maryland. The Appalachian Trail is a footpath across 2,168 miles of Appalachian Mountain ridgelines from Georgia to Maine. Here in Maryland, it follows the ridgeline of South Mountain.

Activities

- ☐ **Create a Nature Trail-** Depending on the size of your yard, you may be able to create a trail system in your park. Parks have marked trails for people to follow, so they don't get lost. Trails are often color coded. Are you able to make any paths or trails in your park? *Kids- With an adult's help, make some of your own trails.* Draw a trail map for your trails. Be sure to give your trail a name, too!
- ☐ **Make Signs for Your Trails-** In addition to directional markers on the trails, there are often interpretive or educational signs on trails to help you to learn more about what you are seeing in the park. Design a sign for your park! Interpretive signs help to identify a particular plant along the trail- you may want to identify the native plants in your garden or a specific tree in your park. But interpretive signs can also be about animals that you might find there or important facts about history in that area. These interpretive signs usually have a picture and some fun facts on them, so people can learn something new. Show us a sign from your park!
- ☐ **National Trails Day-** Maryland State Parks will be celebrating National Trails Day on June 6, 2020. It's a great day to get out on a trail and take a hike or volunteer to do some trail work! If you happened to miss out on National Trails Day, that's ok- any day is a great day to celebrate in your own park!



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Create Your Own State Park

Additional Activities

Additional Activities

- ❑ **Make an Artist-type Drawing of your Own Park-** This can be done on a large sheet of paper, or poster board if you have it. (Feel free to recycle a cardboard box, if you want!) Use crayons, markers or pens to show the current layout of your home and yard from a 'bird's eye view'. Be sure to have a key or labels for any significant features. Share your drawing with us!
- ❑ **Be a Park Ranger-** Print off and color your very own "My MD Ranger" for each person in your family. If you don't have access to a printer, create or draw your own ranger with whatever materials you have on hand! What are some of the jobs of a Park Ranger? Make a list of things that Park Rangers do. You and your family will need to fill these roles at your park. Show us a photo of you and your My MD Ranger cutouts at your park! Share your adventures with your "My MD Ranger" online with social media using **#MyMDRanger**, if you'd like. https://dnr.maryland.gov/publiclands/Documents/Jr-Rangers_LatH/Jr-Ranger_FlatRangers.pdf
- ❑ **Design a Logo for Your Park Souvenirs-** Some parks have a Camp Store or Concessions Area that serves as a Gift Shop and sells souvenirs. Be creative and design a logo for your new state park that could be used to make t-shirts, postcards or stickers! Think about its name and the features that make your park stand out and try to include this on your design. Be sure to include your new logo on your park drawing somehow! **Bonus Activity-** *Design and send us a postcard from your new state park! Mail it to: Ranger Melissa Boyle Acuti, Maryland Park Service, 580 Taylor Ave. E-3, Annapolis MD 21041.*
- ❑ **Design a Park Brochure for Your Park-** What are the "Top 5 Things to Do" at your park? Put together a brochure showcasing everything that makes your park unique and special. Be sure to highlight your favorite areas of the park! Share your brochure with us!
- ❑ **Include Sustainable Practices at Your Park-** There are many different ways to incorporate sustainable practices at your park. Here are a few examples, but can you think of any others?
 - Minimize or Eliminate Pesticides and Fertilizers
 - Grow Your Own Vegetable Garden
 - Install Rain Barrels
 - Make a Compost Pile



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Create Your Own State Park Summer Challenge Checklist

Creating your own State Park at your home can provide a place to enjoy the outdoors, see more birds and butterflies, try new activities and have plenty of fun! State Parks in Maryland provide experiences that allow people to visit new places, connect with nature, be inspired, relax in a beautiful and quiet environment, and get refreshed and revitalized by the wonder of nature! But remember, nature isn't only found in State Parks, it's all around and should be enjoyed from home, too.

Take this Summer Challenge and use the checklist below to help you to turn your own home into a State Park! Challenge your friends and neighbors to do the same!

Complete TEN (or more!) activities below, then submit your responses to:

<https://tinyurl.com/createyourown2020>

before September 7, 2020

**to receive an official "Create Your Own State Parks" Certificate
and be entered to win Summer Challenge Prizes**

All "Create Your Own State Parks" should include these THREE elements:

- ☐ Artist-type Drawing of **YOUR** State Park
- ☐ **YOUR** State Park's Name
- ☐ **YOUR** State Park's General Location (County and City, State)

**YOUR State Park should include at least ONE activity
from as many of these areas as possible:**

- ☐ Park Entrance
- ☐ Woodland Area
- ☐ Birding Area
- ☐ Wildflower Gardens
- ☐ Camping Area
- ☐ Picnic Area
- ☐ Trails



Additional Activities for Your Homegrown State Park:

- ☐ Park Rangers - "My MD Ranger"
- ☐ Park Brochure
- ☐ Park Souvenirs
- ☐ Sustainable Practices

All "Create Your Own State Park" Summer Challenge Entries Due by Monday, September 7, 2020



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Create Your Own State Park Summer Challenge Activity Sheet

Use this sheet to help track some of the activities you have completed.



Park's Name

General Location (County and City, State)

Park Rules

Top 5 Things to Do

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Common Wildlife

Park Staff Names

List of Supplies for a
Camping Trip

Common Plants & Trees

Park Ranger Duties

Favorite Campfire Song



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